

Abstract ID : 49

Title : A preliminary comparison of captive and wild dolphin behavior based on trainer comments and survey responses after examination of underwater video sequences of wild dolphins

Category : Behavior

Student :

Preferred Format : Either Oral or Poster Presentation

Abstract : At the 30th EAAM and 30th IMATA meetings, we distributed 50 copies of a 25-minute video showing the underwater behavior of three dolphin species with two surveys querying trainers about similarities and differences in behavior between “their” dolphins and those depicted in the video. A 34% (N = 17) response was received with multiple countries represented: Europe (N = 10), Japan (N = 2), Mexico (N = 1), and USA (N = 4). Overall, trainers reported significantly more similarities in behavior between wild and captive dolphins with two respondents stating: “all behavior on the video I see with our dolphins.” Trainers documented several behaviors in apparent agreement with meaning as defined from observations of wild dolphins. Tail slapping was reported mainly as a sign of irritation (45.5%) or frustration (22.7%), but was also suggested in play (31.8%) from both trainers and video-documented dolphins. Pectoral fin rubs were used in appeasement (15.4%), comfort (7.7%), and affection (26.9%) more so than in sexual (7.7%) contexts or not at all (7.7%). Interestingly, only one trainer responded that pectoral fin rubs were observed in greeting which is opposite to what is observed in the wild. Dolphins in static social groups might not need to greet one another regularly. Sexual and aggressive behaviors were similar between both settings with jaw claps, hitting, biting, chasing and ramming with loud vocalizations the primary action patterns observed in both. Four trainers indicated no difference between the wild-videotaped and captive individuals, though more significant was the fact that no overlap in differences was reported by any two trainers. Based on these results, we have refined hypotheses to conduct a comprehensive study of captive and wild dolphin behavior. This ongoing study merges advantages from both environments to facilitate a more thorough understanding of the communication and societal structures of dolphins.